



**MG Michael S. Tucker**

**Indianhead Column**

**October 1, 2010**



### Preventing Sexual Assault, a priority

Tell someone.

If I receive news that a Soldier in our ranks has been sexually assaulted, I immediately think about the moment when he or she tells a parent or loved one. I cannot even begin to understand what the Soldier must be experiencing, but the anger and fear the Soldier's parent or loved one must also be experiencing is heart wrenching.

As the commander of this great Division, to hear that any Soldier has been hurt is of great concern to me. I truly hate hearing these stories. But, as long as I hear them, that means the survivor will have the opportunity to get help medically, spiritually, legally or emotionally. But, far too few victims of sexual assault ever report what has happened. There are many reasons why someone might not want to tell about their experience – shame, guilt for doing something that was against the rules (like underage drinking), the need to forget, fear of retribution – all of these reasons are personal.

I'm here to tell you, it is not your fault that you were assaulted, no matter what you were doing, wearing or where you were at. We really do understand that each survivor of sexual assault has to make his or her own decision about whether or not to tell their story. But, it is important for you to know there are options for you.

About five years ago, the Army made some sweeping changes to how it handles sexual assault cases. First, the focus was shifted from being about the criminal and legal aftermath to being about prevention and the survivor's recovery. His/her well-being is what is most critical. So, the Army instituted an additional reporting option. Now, you can choose a restricted report or an unrestricted report.

Unrestricted means the command, law enforcement, the chaplain, medical and survivor support personnel will all be part of actively responding to a sexual assault case. That means you have a chance at finding justice.

Restricted reporting allows a sexual assault survivor to tell a select group of four people without triggering law enforcement or command involvement. So, you can keep things secret and still receive medical, spiritual and emotional support through your recovery process. The four people are: a chaplain, the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, a Unit Victim Advocate or Department of Defense Medical Personnel. If you tell any of these people, they will keep your confidence while still supporting your recovery.

The Division's Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Program just received some new energy with the certification of 12 new Sexual Assault Unit Victim Advocates and one new Deployable Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. So, there are now more people in our formations to whom you can tell your story. They received some top-notch training in Yongsan earlier this month and are available now to help.

I'm very excited that they are on board. They are all very dedicated to helping survivors. This is probably the most important job they have, more important than doing staff duty and just as important as their daily mission.

I am challenging these 13 leaders to foster a climate of knowledge about this type of crime and understanding of survivors' struggles through leader and small group training, so that we reduce the number of sexual assaults to zero. But, we have our work cut out for us.

While our R.E.A.L. Warrior campaign has no doubt contributed to a steep decline in sexual assaults so far this year, I have some concern by the low number of reports. According to the



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numbers, it looks like we are reducing assaults. But, we can't be sure of that. All we can know for certain is that fewer people are reporting than they did last year. I want to ensure that we have a climate of support and advocacy in our units.

First off, in addition to our annual requirement of four hours of SAPR training per year, I am encouraging company commanders and first sergeants to use their UVAs during the weekend safety briefings. A small group approach to this type of instruction has proven to be more effective. The intimate climate lets survivors feel more comfortable with coming forward. Having the UVA conduct the training allows the survivor to develop trust in that person, which may be enough to get them to make an unrestricted or a restricted report.

Secondly, we are developing ways to spread the message without using the "death-by-PowerPoint" method. In the next few months we hope to be able to bring a dynamic and entertaining stage program to Warrior Country called "Sex Signals."

This interactive play challenges perceptions of sexual assault without being preachy or boring. It has had rave reviews and I can't wait to see it in our R.E.A.L Warrior speakers program line-up.

Also, be aware that leaders are held to a high standard in Warrior Country. Officers or NCOs involved in misconduct goes against everything the Army stands for and it will not be tolerated in this fine Division. Here's how I am handling this: If you haven't already read our updated policy letter, # 36 (Limitation on Exercise of Uniform Code of Military Justice Authority), read it now. In it, I explain how all reports of alleged leader misconduct (staff sergeant above and warrant and commissioned officers of all grades) must hit my desk prior to local investigation and disposal. That means, I will know about every single leader who is alleged to have done something wrong.

Finally, the new UVAs were so motivated to make an impact after their training that they came up with several fabulous ideas to help prevent assaults in the Division. Seventy-three percent of the assaults in the Division this year occurred on post, mostly in the barracks.

To end that trend, the new UVAs talked about organizing a group of people to walk visibly tipsy Soldiers home from "the Ville" on Friday and Saturday nights and make sure they make it safely to their barracks rooms. We will support their efforts to get this plan rolling and we can't wait to hear more of their ideas.

Warriors, I am confident that we can reduce the number of assaults to zero. I've outlined a few of the ways here, but there is more to do. Above all, the SAPR program is a plan created to make Soldiers feel safe and strong in their communities. Leaders have a responsibility to support the tenets of the program. Soldiers of all ranks need to know that as their leader, I will do whatever I can to protect them from harm.

Survivors, we believe in your right to privacy but, please at least consider making a report, whether it is restricted or unrestricted reporting- just TELL SOMEONE.

You can trust that regardless of which option you choose, you will have an Army of support behind you that is 'Second to None!'